

OCCUPATIONAL



REAL STORIES OF OCCUPATIONAL DEATHS INVOLVING WASHINGTON CHILDREN

Matt, a 16-year-old boy working at a wrecking yard, was struck and killed when a hoist holding a load with an engine suspended, tipped over and hit him in the head.

Chris and Jim, two 16-year-olds, were working on a dairy farm, and suffocated when they entered a silo filled with hay. The incident occurred after the silo had been filled and sealed for almost three days.

Summary

Adolescents under the age of 18¹ in Washington State and nationwide are injured in the workplace at twice the rate of adults. Among Washington minors (11-17 years old), there are approximately 2,500 accepted worker compensation referrals to the Department of Labor & Industries each year.² Over a 16-year span, 1988-2003, there were 13 work-related fatalities among Washington youth. The leading cause of occupational injury death among Washington youth is agricultural machinery.

Nationally, about one-third of teens that are injured at work are injured seriously enough to require treatment in a hospital emergency department.

Prevention strategies include:

- Educating parents, teens and employers about restrictions for hazardous work and restricted work hours for minors.
- Educating teens about their right to a safe and healthy workplace.
- Educating teens about their right to refuse to do dangerous work.
- Enforcement of child labor and safety regulations are also important in preventing these injuries.

¹ The majority are 16-17 years old, although children as young as 12 are allowed to work in some agriculture settings.

² A work-related injury that requires more than first aid should be reported as a claim for industrial insurance, also known as workers' compensation, to cover costs for medical care, lost work time, or

both. There are approximately 8 percent more claims that are reported to the system but are not accepted for various reasons. In addition, due to issues related to underreporting, it is estimated that claims reported to workers' compensation programs may under-represent the actual number of workplace injuries.

- All employers are required to have a Minor Work Permit to hire minors, and a permission slip, known as a Parent/School Authorization Form, signed by the parent and by the school while it is in session. Parents should be aware that they need to sign this form giving permission for their teen to work, and to be sure that the employer is aware of the laws protecting them.
- Parents and teens should be aware that there are restrictions for hazardous work for minors and restricted work hours. This information is available at www.Lni.wa.gov/workplacerrights/teenworkers.
- Parents and teens should be aware that the minimum age for minors to work is 14. The number of hours per week, starting and quitting times, and work activities are more limited for 14- and 15-year-olds. The hours of work also differ for all minors while school is in session.
- Teens should know their rights, which include the right to a safe and healthy workplace, and the right to refuse to do dangerous work. Teens should know what work activities they are not permitted to perform. They should know that they can decline to do a task that they have not been trained to do. They should be encouraged to ask the following questions in any job:
 - What are the hazards and dangers of my job?
 - What are my health and safety responsibilities?
 - Will I receive job safety training and information on any safety gear I'll need to wear?
 - Who do I ask if I have a health and safety question?
 - What do I do if I get hurt?
- More information regarding youth safety resources and hiring minors is available at www.Lni.wa.gov/WorkplaceRights/TeenWorkers; by calling 360-902-5316 (Olympia); or by calling a local Labor & Industries office found in the blue government section of the white pages. Questions can also be sent by email to teensafety@Lni.wa.gov.

PREVENTION STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNITIES

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- Encourage high schools and job training and placement programs to integrate curricula about workplace safety and teens' on-the-job rights.
- A research study in three communities indicated the following community-based approaches are promising strategies for preventing workplace injuries to minors:
 - Develop community coalitions comprised of business associations, labor groups, schools, job placement and training programs, youth-advocacy groups, teen organizations, government agencies, health care providers, and family members.
 - Encourage community coalitions to provide information to employers on the regulations for hiring minors, including the need to have a minor work endorsement or permit, the importance of providing training when a young worker is new to a job, and the need to provide periodic retraining and ongoing supervision.
 - Conduct an assessment of the community to determine the extent and nature of local teen employment and workplace injury. Based on the composition of the types of industries in the community, target outreach measures based on the potential job activities and hazards teens are likely to encounter.
 - Provide training and educational resources to members of the community so all are informed about the major issues concerning young workers.
 - Assess teen attitudes towards work and workplace safety and health issues through the use of surveys or focus groups, and promote peer education programs to address workplace safety and health issues.

Number of Injuries

Teens in Washington State and nationwide, are injured in the workplace at a rate two times higher than adults. Among Washington minors (11-17 years old), there are approximately 2,500 accepted worker compensation referrals to the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries each year. During 1988-2003, there were 13 work-related deaths among Washington youth.

Cause of Injuries

Most adolescent occupational injuries occur in the retail sector, primarily restaurants and grocery stores where most teens are employed. Other workplaces where teens are injured include hotels and motels, healthcare, construction, manufacturing, and agriculture. Almost 50 percent of injuries occur during the first six months on the job. Some injuries occur in situations that violate Washington's child labor regulations, such as when youth are performing prohibited duties. However, most injuries occur in job duties allowed under the child labor regulations.

There are a number of reasons teen workers are more likely to be injured on the job: they lack experience, are eager to please, and are often performing hazardous work. They are often unaware of the child labor laws, feel hesitant to ask questions or speak up about health and safety concerns, and frequently do not receive adequate supervision or occupational safety and health training. Developmentally, they may be physically and cognitively unprepared for the tasks they are asked to do. In addition, they are risk-takers lacking a sense of vulnerability that may place them in jeopardy in the work environment.

Type of Non-fatal Injuries

The most common types of injuries include slips and falls, strains and sprains, burns, and lacerations. More severe injuries include fractures, concussions, dislocations, amputations, and multiple injuries.

Time Trends

The average number of accepted worker compensation claims for injured minors (11-17 years old) in Washington State and nationally has been declining over time. In Washington, the average number of claims was about 4,500 per year during 1988-1991, about 2,900 per year in 1992-1996, and about 2,200 per year during 1997-2002. The reasons for this decline have not been identified.

Intent

All Washington State workplace injuries described above were unintentional.

Age and Gender

In 1990, the occupational injury rate for adolescent males in Washington State was twice that found for adolescent females. This is consistent with current national data. Over the past 11 years through 2002, the difference in the injury rate for boys and girls has narrowed. However, boys continue to be injured at work about 40 percent more than girls.

About 95 percent of injuries occurred among youth 16-17 years old.

Death Summary

During 1988-2003 there were 13 deaths. All were males. Five died from motor vehicle crashes, two from machinery, two from suffocation, two from being struck by or against an object, one from a fall, and one from drowning.